

BC Ferry Services Inc.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details

Date June 25, 2009
Time 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Location Board Room, BC Ferries, 1112 Fort Street, Victoria, BC

Attendance

Public Interest Representatives

Susan Gallagher, Treasurer Victoria chapter, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
Hugh Mitchell, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Jane Sheaff, Seniors Serving Seniors
Ernie Stigant, Multiple Sclerosis Society
Scott Heron, BC Paraplegic Association
Valerie Thoem, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
Mark Nicol, Assistive Technology Specialist, CNIB

BC Ferries Representatives

Peter Simpson, Director Operational Strategy, Fleet Operations, Co-Chair
Karen Chrabasz, Manager Customer Relations, Customer Care Department
Bill McCormick, Customer Service representative, Customer Care Department
Bruce Paterson, Fleet Technical Director, Engineering
Paul McDaniel, Regional Director South, Terminal Operations
David Carroll, Director, Terminal Construction, Engineering
Jeff Davidson, Director Retail Services, Food and Retail Operations
Judy Peterson, Employee Development Coordinator, Training

Regrets

Pat Danforth, Disability Resource Centre, Co-Chair
Dawn Day, CNIB
Mary-Kay Kennedy, CNIB
Albert Ruel, Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
Barb Britton-Wilson, Director Catering Services
Erinn Grant, Manager, Communications

Introductions

Co-Chair Peter Simpson welcomed the members and relayed the regrets from Pat Danforth on being unable to attend. Introductions were made as several new members to the committee were in attendance.

Review of minutes – December 4, 2008

The minutes of the meeting of December 4, 2008 were approved. No matters were arising from the minutes.

Standing Items

Transport Canada Recommendations

Bruce Paterson addressed several continuing issues and discussions with Transport Canada (TC). The report from the Transportation Safety Board into the Queen of the North sinking referenced the use of passenger manifests and reported that such a process was suitable for implementation on overnight or long voyages such as those sailings into the north coast. BC Ferries (BCF) has implemented these manifests which include passengers producing personal ID and the identification of any special needs for travellers. Review of our operations and discussion with TC has shown that a manifest system is not suitable for short voyage day ferries with large passenger loads and quick turnarounds in place for our southern ferry operations. BCF continues to work with TC and other ferry operators on developing guidelines on special arrangements for persons with special or additional needs. It was noted that locally, BCF is instituting practices for evacuation of peoples needing assistance or alternate arrangements. BCF is also adopting evacuation slides as the preferred life-saving equipment as part of new ship construction or major upgrades to the existing fleet – these systems are much more adaptable to persons with special requirements. Information continues to be exchanged with TC on the issue of identification of persons with disabilities – whether this is requirement that is voluntary or directed. A directed or mandatory requirement by TC may become overly prescriptive and there is concern over how ‘heavy a hand’ an operator has to impose to meet identification guidelines or regulations. Voluntary identification requires a different approach and currently Karen Chrabasz is liaising with Marine Atlantic on what they are doing, where voluntary identification occurs (pre-ticketing, ticketing, boarding, on-board), the time & resources needed to develop and sustain the program and how to address familiarizing disabled persons with the ship and voyage. There was discussion by the group on how people present themselves and that people will choose not to present themselves as a disabled person requiring assistance. There was general discussion on methods available to travellers either through announcements, TV monitor or through the BCF website. Further, there was discussion on the separate issues of people identifying themselves prior to loading and the options available either during ticketing or through a pre-travel process. The discussion led into some specific areas related to response during emergency conditions, e.g. mobility concerns and/or elevator access for passengers with disabilities on vessels where the evacuation deck can be different or in addition to the passenger decks. Crew response during an emergency for passengers requiring special assistance is either through the assignment of a crewmember or assigning one or more responsible passengers to assist disabled persons. It was agreed as a first step that Karen Chrabasz would investigate multiple media options – web, print, audio, and video – with the objective to then provide and enhance the information already given to appropriate organizations for distribution to travellers who may require additional assistance.

Training

Judy Peterson joined the group later in the meeting and presented on the Training Departments program for new hire employees. Training material was presented identifying how the company orients employees to assisting and serving passengers with disabilities, the resources available to crew to aid in dealing with passengers who need special assistance and included excerpts from evacuation training material on the proper approach when responding to emergencies that involve immobile passengers or passengers with disabilities. Judy provided background on the overall numbers related to staff training. The committee identified that the training material

was good, but that an opportunity existed to use the knowledge and perspective of disabled persons in the development of training content. Members of the committee indicated they would either be available to provide this input or be able to arrange for review of course materials specific to persons with disabilities.

Loading Practices

Paul McDaniel spoke to the committee on passenger loading, giving information and insight into the complexities of coordinating the management of providing for special assistance when arriving passengers are processed at multiple booths - sometimes at the same moment, the arrivals may include small numbers or very large numbers of passengers needing assistance and the limits on a vessel by vessel basis for appropriate vehicle spaces by elevators. The terminal staff responds to these situations as they arise but there as there is no certainty on what will arrive for any given sailing must react and respond with the resources available to them. Paul identified the practice of using four way flashers for vehicles carrying customers with special needs as a means to show that extra space is needed for the occupants to move in and out of their vehicle. The question of signage was raised, and some messaging system will be pursued, but with primary consideration to the avoidance of 'sign confusion' where too much is presented to drivers that may distract from safely driving on the terminal. The company currently uses placards to identify to ships crew that a vehicle has a passenger needing extra space – this is being enhanced to further identify which side of the vehicle the space is required. Currently done at Departure Bay and Swartz Bay and will be expanded across the fleet. Karen Chrabasz told the committee that an IT project was underway to update our point of sale system with the capacity to identify all types of passengers, including those with disabilities. This information can be used in anticipating future needs where clear trends can be predicted. Sue Gallagher identified a issue of particular concern to persons with low vision capacity – the telescoping foot passenger ramps dip at each section of the ramp and this can cause problems as the height change is not marked on the ramp. A site visit would be arranged to examine the possible solutions. It was raised that disabled persons travelling without a vehicle had difficulty accessing terminal shopping areas, Paul advised the committee that the company tries to keep all foot passengers in the foot passenger buildings, which in most terminals is separate to the food and retails spaces (Tsawwassen, Swartz Bay, Horseshoe Bay) and that this is the case for all travellers going without vehicles. Paul also reported that ticket booths levels have been or are in the process of being adjusted to better serve wheelchair passengers.

Vessel Developments

Northern Expedition

Bruce and Jeff updated the committee on the Northern Expedition which was introduced into service on May 18. The vessel was built to meet Transport Canada accessibility guidelines with passage way and elevator widths suitable for motorized wheelchairs. The ship is equipped with automatic door openers for the outer decks and major lounges with closing doors. The ship has three wheelchair accessible staterooms with suitable design of the washroom, shower, desk and bed. The restaurants feature loose seating and are fully wheelchair accessible throughout with aisles generally wider in food and entertainment areas. The ship comes equipped with a significant number (10+) audio/video monitors.

Northern Adventure

Bruce provided a further update on the refit for the Northern Adventure. There were changes to the access/egress for foot passengers to mitigate the long turnaround. The escalator (which was non-functioning) was removed and replaced with stairs. The elevator was re-built and is more reliable; however there was no increase in the size of the elevator.

Island Sky

The committee was advised the Island Sky entered service on the Sunshine Coast during the spring and has performed well. The ship was scheduled to return to the shipyard for warranty work in the fall and further updates would be provided at the next meeting.

Quinsam and Quinitsa

Bruce provided the committee with information related to refits for the commuter, open car deck Q class ferries. Work has included changing curbs on the ships to ramps, wheelchair accessible washrooms were upgraded, new slide evacuation systems were installed (as noted above) and the ship used various design features from the Kuper new-build and incorporated these into the Q class.

Queen of New Westminster

The New West completed a major mid-life upgrade program to prepare the ship to run as a supplementary or relief vessel on Route 1 (Tsawwassen-Swartz Bay). The ship has some of the same problems of the former V class ferries (Saanich & Vancouver). The New West will still be one of the least accessible on the car decks with respect to lane width, however the upper car deck has higher clearance and is able to take more over height vehicles. The ship was retro-fitted with a slide evacuation system.

Terminal Developments

David Carroll addressed the group on the activities of the Terminal Construction department. His group is working to modernizing all the terminals and improving accessibility. Any new or renovated construction activity is governed by building and construction codes which are always met and that additional requirements are self imposed on their work through our Ferry Boarding Facilities code. David briefed the group on the development of principles in barrier-free architecture and access guidelines and the involvement of Universal Design in making improvements.

Pre-Travel Information and Website Status

Karen updated the group on the work being in Customer Care. TTY technology is not currently explained on the website, that it is available by calling Telus but that BCF will be looking to raise the profile of the number for passengers to call to access it. Passengers can book reservations via email or online without needing to speak with a customer agent. The pre-trial of the new website has moved ahead with most changes 'behind the scenes' within the system architecture to improve performance. Phase 2 will be the web view changing so it is similar to the airline models, staged with information on accessibility included in each page. BC Ferries is looking at a single point of access on the web for persons seeking accessibility assistance – but this will involve changes to the background architecture affecting as many as 700

web pages. Karen advised that she and Pat Danforth are working on vessel-specific information and what each ship offers in the way of accessibility options.

Other Business

No other business as the meeting ran long.

Next Meeting

To be determined